



## Church of the Brethren General Board

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# Welfare Reform

June 1973

*The following Resolution on Welfare Reform was adopted by the Church of the Brethren General Board meeting in Fresno, CA, June 1973.*

### Our Reasons for Concern

Millions of U.S. residents are still deprived of the basic necessities of life and trapped in poverty within our affluent society. Continued widespread poverty in the midst of affluence reflects the negligence of all levels of government to meet the needs of all people, as well as the distorted value systems of our society.

Many community leaders and groups are committed to making the struggle to overcome poverty an urgent national priority. Believing that persons are God's most cherished creation, and that it is our stewardship responsibility to encourage the centers of power in our nation to establish and maintain a health and welfare system that is sensitive to both the need and potential of every person, it becomes incumbent upon the church to share in this commitment and responsibility.

Historically, the Judeo-Christian faith has provided motivation and impetus for the church's concern for social welfare; a concern for the welfare of the poor, the widow, and the orphan is a vital part of the New Testament message.

For the Christian this concern must not center around the "deserving and the undeserving," but around the sacredness of all human life. The Christian faith teaches that all persons are entitled to a humane standard of living. The Church of the Brethren has recognized this right to a humane standard of living throughout its history in its frequent calls for practical help for those in misfortune or with serious, unmet needs. In line with this heritage the 1968 Annual Conference called for a replacement or a drastic revision of our whole present welfare system. Current public attitudes and government actions regarding the poor among us and our present welfare system call for the church again to speak out on this unsolved problem. Although we have made great achievements as a nation, we have yet to live up to our potential and responsibility in caring and providing for those persons among us who are still deprived of the basic necessities that make for a humane standard of living.

### Public Attitudes Cited

These public attitudes might be cited:

- a lack of comprehension of the nature of our present welfare system, a pervasive negative image of poor people and those on welfare, an apathy about poverty concerns, and a failure to link welfare solutions to societal self-interest;
- a lack of knowledge about the effects of our economic system on all people including the consequences of automation and technology on employment;
- an uncritical adherence to a narrowly conceived Protestant work ethic which insists that a person's worth depends upon his/her productivity;

- a failure to be as critical or more critical of the many affluent corporations and farmers who receive sizable government subsidies for their welfare, as we are critical of poor people who receive welfare checks in order to exist--that is, a lack of understanding of our nation's whole "welfare-subsidy" system;
- a racism that affects the way in which the dominant majority of our population perceives the welfare problem and prescribes solutions; and
- a common desire by many employers to maintain a low-paid labor pool.

### Governmental Actions Cited

These governmental actions might be cited:

- the present Administration's current lack of interest in replacing or drastically revising our welfare system;
- a decreased pressure by the states for a national reform of our welfare system due to their receiving fiscal relief through revenue sharing;
- a possibility that many states will use their shared revenue to decrease taxes rather than to meet urgent human needs;
- the lack of uniformity among states in administering and appropriating welfare funds.

### Our Recommendations

In the light of this total situation we would strongly reaffirm as our nation's goals these two recommendations in the 1968 Church of the Brethren Annual Conference Statement to Leaders of the United States

*Government:*

*We recommend enactment of legislation which would provide a basic floor of economic support for all Americans (U. S. residents), be it by a guaranteed annual income, negative income tax, or family allotment, as may be found best after thorough study.*

*We recommend a shift in priorities in the use of existing government income in order to provide the resources needed for such programs. We pledge our willingness to help pay the taxes needed to make these possible.*

Until legislation providing a basic floor of economic support of all U.S. residents is enacted we reaffirm another paragraph of the 1968 Statement:

*We call for drastic revision of the welfare system. Punitive and degrading aspects of current welfare practices should be eliminated, especially those which disrupt family life and discourage employment. Each citizen should be assisted toward receiving all the benefits which are legally his. More attention must be given to the reclamation of those individuals and groups currently alienated from society and unable to contribute to it positively.*

### Implementation

To implement these revisions of the present welfare system we recommend:

- that increased efforts be made through government, private agencies and the mass media to educate the public concerning poverty in our midst and the myths which bias many of our citizens against the poor;
- that the government provide training and employment in socially useful and constructive jobs for persons unable to find employment in the private sector, work which will help individuals maintain personal dignity and which will not pay less than the national minimum wage;
- that the government provide developmental child care alternatives for the children of mothers who choose to work outside the home;

- that churches, schools and private social agencies offer more counseling, management and legal services to poor families on a free or low-cost basis;
- that we support the fundamental freedom of poor people to organize themselves into welfare rights groups in order to work nonviolently for a humane standard of living, for economic and social justice, and for the right of self-determination.

We believe it is time to call again for a major change in our national social welfare goals and programs, changes which would: 1) demonstrate genuine concern for the dignity and humanity of persons caught in poverty, 2) provide basic necessities sufficient to sustain a humane level of living, and 3) encourage and develop economic independence.

*Adopted by the General Board, June 1973*